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EAST TIMOR: THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATION

A SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

Final Report

By

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**In cooperation with The Bank of Indonesia and
The Local Development Planning Board
for the Province of East Timor**

**Yogyakarta
1990**

cultivating kinship, so that members of an extended family can get to know each other. If members of a family do not know each other, then problems such as marriages between relatives or members of the same extended family are bound to occur. This is in fact incompatible with both customary and religious norms. At the same time, the group who agreed with the regulation often saw the negative impact of such festivities, such as gambling, drunkenness, sexual offences, fighting or even murder.

4.6.1 System of Kinship

Village society in East Timor recognises two principle lines of descent, that is the dominant line of descent from the father (patrilineal) and the other (matrilineal) from the mother. The purpose of the two lines of descent is, amongst other things, the existance of a rule which establishes that the patrilineal principle would change if the man's family was unable to pay the bride price (*belis* or *berlaki*) required by the woman's family. If this situation did occur then the bridegroom had to live in the house of the woman's family and contribute work up to the value of the *belis* that he was obliged to pay

The largest family unit is the clan. A particular clan can be identified by the ownership of a particular *umalulik*. The members of a clan are dispersed into family groups known tin the Tetum language as fuan. Each fuan lives in a community known as an uma. Each uma normally only consists of not more than ten houses.

The people of East Timor divide each family group into two parts (fratri), that is fetosa and umane. These two terms have a connection with the principle of exogamy in their marriages. Fetosa is the family group which takes the girl and umane is the giver of the girl. This matter is explained in more detail below.

4.7 Status and Role of Women

A description of the role of women in the villages of East Timor cannot be separated from an analysis of the culture of the local community, especially the role of women after marriage. Such an analysis will show how the society places women in relation to other members of society, particularly men.

In the matter of looking for a life partner, the village communities of East Timor adhere to the principle of clan exogamy, meaning a wedding cannot take place between members of one's own clan. For this purpose, the local community divides clans into two groups, that is clans giving women (fetosa) and clans receiving women (umane). A particular clan can act as a fetosa for fixed clans, but at the same time be a umane for other clans. The diagram below illustrates these relationships.

To obtain a girl or perform a marriage, a youth's family must pay the bride price (*belis* or *berlaki*) requested by the girls family. This is usually in the form of livestock, such as cows, buffalos, goats, sheep, horses and pigs numbering dozens or even hundreds. The function of the *belis* itself is as recompense to the girls family for all the costs involved in raising her and also the loss of labour power to the clan giving the girl. If the youth's family has already fully paid the *belis* then the rights to the woman are fully in the hands of the youth.

The size of the *belis* demanded is not absolute. If the youth's family objects to the *belis* demanded by the girl's family, then the youth can bargain until the amount is reduced and eventually agreement is reached. Nevertheless it is not infrequent for the youth to be unable to pay the price asked for the girl. If this occurs then the normal solution is for the youth to work for the girl's family for a fixed period of time. The bride price system indicates the high value placed on women in the society.

The *belis* that the woman receives after the wedding ceremony will be distributed amongst her relatives by her *nai* or maternal uncle. The relatives who receive a share of the *belis*

must be prepared at a later time to contribute if one of the members of their family acts as a receiver of a girl (giver of *belis*). From this it can be seen that the ownership of livestock in the villages of East Timor is of a very social nature. Livestock are not only owned by one's nuclear family but are the property of a broader family group or even of a *umalulik*. From this the status of women in the community is clear. Without the presence of women it would be extremely difficult for a family to obtain the large amount of livestock which will later be used to pay the *belis* for their sons. Because of this, the respect of a youth towards his sisters often appears to be higher than that shown towards his brothers.

After marriage a woman becomes fully the property of her husband. She must carry out everything she is ordered to do by her husband, such as housework (washing clothes, cooking and minding children), contributing to the family income by working in the plantation and selling the produce and by making various types of handicraft such as woven cloth (*tais*), baskets for storing maize or rice (*luhu* or *bote*) and mats made from the leaves of *lontar* palm (*biti*).

A table is presented below which shows the division of tasks between men and women on a coffee plantation and in the rice fields.

TABLE 4.1 Division of tasks between men and women on the plantation and in the rice fields.

	Male	Female
Clearing the land	XX	-
Planting	-	XX
Looking after the plants	X	XX
Harvesung	X	XX
Preparing the land for replanting after harvesting	XX	XX

Explanation: - not involved at all
X involved to a small extent
XX an important role

From the above Table can be seen that women play a larger role than men in preparing the land for replanting, planting, looking after the crop and in harvesting. For this reason, it is clear that women need to participate in agricultural extension programs, which up until now have been oriented more towards men's groups. The situation is no different in the farming of food plants or in horticulture. In everyday life women appear to expend more time in looking after the estates than do men.

The heavy load that women must bear appears to be in line with statistics concerning registration of inhabitants such as those in the Table below.

TABLE 4.2 Population composition in East Timor based on sex for 1936, 1960, 1965, 1973 and 1987.

Year	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
1936	245,538 (52.9)	218,458 (47.1)	463,996
1960	267,783 (51.9)	248,293 (48.1)	516,076
1965	291,327 (52.4)	264,396 (47.6)	555,72
1973	329,946 (52.7)	296,600 (47.3)	626,54
1987	331,703 (50.5)	325,708 (49.5)	657,41

Source: Budhisantosa (1980:5); Parsudi Suparlan (1980: 40-1)

The proportion of females in the population was greater in 1987 than in other years. One of the reasons for this was the upheavals which occurred in the mid 1970s. At that time many adult males had to go to the 'battlefields' and were killed, leaving women to assume dual roles, that is as housewifes and breadwinners. In research reported by the sub-district heads several villages had many widows whose husbands had been lost in the political upheavals.